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Leadership and motivation

A qualitative study of transformational leadership and public service motivation

ABSTRACT

Transformational leaders work to clarify a vision, share it with their employees and sustain it in the long run, and this is expected to result in increased employee public service motivation (PSM), that is, orientation towards doing good for others and society. Based on 48 in-depth interviews with 16 childcare leaders and 32 of their employees combined with 16 days of observation in these childcare centers, this article investigates the association between transformational leadership and PSM. When the leaders clarify, share and maintain an organizational vision, their employee are more motivated to do good for society and other, and this motivation tends to be less paternalistic and slightly more society oriented. This implies that it is relevant to ask not only whether transformational leadership increases PSM, but also how it affects the type of PSM.

INTRODUCTION

Public employees perform better if they are oriented towards doing good towards society and others (Andersen, Heinesen, and Pedersen 2014; Bellé 2013; Ritz 2009), and it is therefore highly relevant to ask how leaders can enhance their employees' public service motivation (PSM). According to Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010), transformational leadership is a promising way to increase PSM, because transformational leaders develop, share and sustain a vision, and employees will be more oriented to contribute to society if a strong vision demonstrates what the desirable end state looks like.

As expected, quantitative studies (Wright, Moynihan, and Pandey 2012; Krogsgaard, Thomsen, and Andersen 2014, Bellé 2014; Park and Rainey 2008; Vandenabeele 2014) indicate that transformational leadership increases employees' level of PSM. Insight in the mechanisms and complexity of the leadership-PSM relationship does, however, require more in-depth, qualitative

data, and this article combines interviews and observation data to contribute to a deeper understanding of how transformational leadership can affect the level and type of PSM.

Public service motivation (PSM) is the motivation to serve others and improve the well-being of society at large (Perry and Wise 1990), while transformational leadership concerns leaders' efforts to "develop, share and sustain a vision to elevate follower motivation to higher levels of performance" (Jung and Avolio 2000: 949). It is expected to change and transform people by appealing to the importance of collective and/or organizational outcomes (Northouse 2010: 171; Moynihan, Pandey, and Wright 2012: 147). This sense of vision among employees is expected to provide confidence and direction about the future of the organization and to encourage employees to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization and its users.

Until recently, transformational leadership was primarily studied in private organizations, but we agree with Wright and Pandey's (2010:77) statement that "transformational leadership [may be] particularly useful in public and nonprofit organizations given the service and community oriented nature of their missions". The services provided by public welfare organizations are often at least partly financed by the government, because a political coalition thinks that the service provision benefits the general public. This makes both PSM and transformational leadership very relevant. Specifically, we analyze childcare provision in Denmark, because it is a publicly subsidized service provided by public organizations with a clear leader-employee relationship and tasks which benefit both society and individual other people (the children). This enables us to analyze the dynamics between these two aspects by looking at the contents of the organizational visions. How do leaders develop, share and sustain visions in these organizations, and can their efforts change the content of the employees' PSM?

After a theoretical discussion of transformational leadership and PSM, the method section explains how the 16 childcare centers and 48 interviewees were selected and how the empirical

material was collected. This is followed by an in-depth, qualitative analysis of three hypotheses. The conclusion discusses the findings and calls attention to contributions and limitations.

THEORY: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND PUBLIC SERVICE

MOTIVATION

James Burns (1978) and later Bernard M. Bass (1985) developed the concept “transformational leadership”, which has since been highly influential particularly in the generic leadership literature (Antonakis, Avolio, and Sivasubramaniam 2003). Especially within the public administration literature, existing studies emphasize the visionary element of transformational leadership behavior (Wright and Pandey 2010; Wright et al. 2012). It has three aspects which are all part of our conceptualization of transformational leadership: First, transformational leaders work to develop a clear vision for the organization. Leaders’ efforts to specify the desirable end state for their organization are highly relevant, because a clear and inspiring understanding of what the organization should achieve in the future can be an important driver of employee action and performance (Latham and Yukl 1975; Locke and Latham 2002) and motivation (Wright 2007). Second, transformational leaders share their vision with the employees and establish a clear understanding of what the employees have to do to contribute to its realization. Generating awareness of a vision and how the work contributes to reaching this desirable end state is expected to be essential for employees to act upon it (Paarlberg and Perry 2007). This element of transformational leadership thus concerns articulation of the direction in which the organization is heading and specification of how employees’ day-to-day actions contribute (Paarlberg and Perry 2007; Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010). Third, transformational leaders make an effort to sustain the shared vision in the short and long run by promoting acceptance of and collaboration to achieve the vision and generating continuous enthusiasm. By continuously emphasizing why employees’ work contributes

to the organization and its vision, transformational leaders attempt to reinforce employees' perceptions of task significance and give them energy to pursue relevant actions in the short and long run (Wright et al. 2012).

Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) recently criticized the leadership literature for confounding leadership definitions with their effects, and our conceptual definition of transformational leadership therefore aims at separating the concept from its expected consequences. They argue that the concept should be abandoned altogether and that leadership studies should instead look at visionary leadership, but the visionary element is already the most important part of the conceptualization of transformational leadership in public administration (Wright et al. 2012; Bellé 2014). We also believe that the idea of *transforming* employees to share the vision is better captured by reformulating transformational leadership which is accordingly seen as leaders' attempts to (1) develop a vision for the organization, (2) share the vision with the employees and (3) sustain the employees' attention to the vision.

PSM can be seen as "an individual's orientation to delivering services to people with the purpose of doing good for others and society" (Hondeghem and Perry 2009: 6). It is thus an altruistic type of motivation associated with serving the public good through the provision of public service. Le Grand (2010) makes a distinction between "knaves" with relatively more selfish motivation and "knights" with relatively more altruistic (public service) motivation. Knights can again be subdivided into paternalistic and non-paternalistic knights, depending on whether or not they think that they know best what is good for others and for society. Paternalistic knights thus follow their own understanding of doing good for others and society (Le Grand 2010: 65). Paternalism thus captures a core theme in public administration literature by explicating who should formulate what "doing good" means. This is discussed both in the PSM literature (e.g. Gailmard 2010) and more broadly in relation to for example public policy (e.g. Soss et al. 2011). These

aspects of the concept allow us to discuss in more depth what “doing good” means, and whether it is primarily directed towards “society” or “others”. We are thus inspired by studies (e.g. Andersen, Pallesen, and Salomonsen 2013; Jensen and Andersen 2015) that differentiate between motivation to contribute to society and motivation to help specific others, and we also address whether the employees think that they know best what is good for society and users. It is for example relevant to distinguish between paternalistic knights (trying to do good in the sense defined by them) and non-paternalistic knights (trying to do good as specified by politicians and/or users, Le Grand 2010: 65), because this can have implications for their responsiveness towards users and politicians.

Given that PSM is an altruistic type of motivation, and transformational leadership is about transcending self-interest, the key expectation in the literature is that transformational leadership positively affects PSM (Bellé 2014; Park and Rainey 2008; Wright et al. 2012; Vandenabeele 2014). The argument is that public leaders *can* change their employees’ PSM through transformational leadership by making them look beyond self-interest and be “motivated by experiences and identities that are ‘other regarding’” (Paarlberg and Lavigna 2010, 710). We argue that leaders who try to clarify a vision are better at making the employees see what they are contributing to and thus be more public service motivated as expressed in Hypothesis 1:

H1: Transformational leadership is positively associated with employee PSM.

In childcare centers, the work is focused on the children, and it is therefore plausible that these organizations attract employees who are oriented towards doing good for this group of specific others, and that existing childcare employees are socialized to share this orientation. Society is, however, also a potential beneficiary of childcare centers. Contributing to new generations of well-functioning and dedicated citizens is thus a key objective, but that does not necessarily mean that all childcare employees can see their contribution to society. Childcare center managers are the

connection between employees and political decision-makers, and a key task for these managers is therefore to stimulate employees to do good for society (and not only for individual users).

Transformational leadership can be seen as a translation of overall municipal objectives to visions for the specific childcare center, and these visions can incorporate both "doing good for society" and "helping specific other people". Transformational leadership may therefore increase both types of PSM (society-oriented as well as child-oriented), but we expect the association to be strongest for society-oriented public service motivation, because employees' initial level of child-oriented motivation is already high. Hypothesis 2 expects transformational leaders to open their employees' eyes to the importance of contributing to society because this is a way to highlight the larger meaning behind the specific tasks and thereby emphasize the desirability of the vision.

H2: Transformational leadership in childcare centers results in more society-oriented employee PSM.

An obvious mechanism related to hypothesis 2 would be if the content of the vision emphasizes contributions to society as a whole. Although the tasks of childcare centers are both community- and child-orientated, this cannot be taken for granted, and we will shed light on it by analyzing the content on the visions.

Another way for transformational leaders to align employees' understanding of doing good with the organizational vision is to "de-paternalize" their understanding of what doing good means. In democratic societies, elected politicians have the legitimate right to decide what doing good means in public organizations, and transformational leaders are expected (by translating overall objectives to an organizational vision) to make employees more willing to transcend their self-defined understanding of doing good. This implies more responsiveness towards the politicians, but a similar argument can be made for transformational leaders' effort to make employees more responsive to users. Hypothesis 3 expects transformational leadership to make employees less

paternalistic, because the leaders try to share the same vision in the entire childcare center, thus changing the employees' focus from their own understandings to a collectively defined understanding of what doing good means.

H3: Transformational leadership in childcare centers results in less paternalistic employee PSM.

It cannot be automatically assumed that transformational leadership has the same effect in different organizations. As argued by Paarlberg and Lavigna (2010: 712), motivating employees to act on a shared vision requires alignment between the employees' values with those of the collective. This might depend on the number of employees per leader (i.e. span of control). On the one hand, previous studies on leadership and organizational structures have argued that less distance between leader and employees decreases the potency of the leadership vision (Antonakis and Atwater 2002), because close leaders are seen as less authoritative and powerful than more distant leaders (Cole et al. 2009). Leaders with few employees may become too caught up in everyday activities, and this may reduce the authority of the vision and thus make the employees perceive it as less important. On the other hand, leaders with fewer employees may have more opportunity to communicate the vision to each employee and show how it relates to everyday activities. These conflicting expectations indicate that it is relevant to include childcare centers with both relatively wide and relatively narrow spans of control to see whether the expectations are valid in both types of organizations.

The association between leadership and employee motivation might also depend on the hierarchical leadership structure. If there is only one leader (e.g. the childcare center leader) between the employees and the regulatory level (e.g. the municipality), this leader might have more discretion to develop visions that are organization-specific and in line with employees' perception of what is valuable compared to a situation with two levels of leaders between employees and the

regulatory level. It is also possible that two levels of leaders could improve the translation of political objectives into meaningful visions, again making the vision more authoritative and powerful and thus strengthening the association between the direct leader's transformational leadership and employee motivation. Again, this speaks in favor of including organizations with both types of hierarchical structure to see whether there are indications that the relationships differ.

Different task difficulty can mean different capacity for leaders to succeed in motivating employees through transformational leadership, and for childcare centers it is especially relevant to be aware of the resource allocation and the children's social backgrounds and resources. In this first qualitative analysis of the relationship between transformational leadership and PSM, we focus on organizations with similar resources and task difficulty and systematic variation in span of control and hierarchical structure. The next section explains how the research design handles this.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This section explains how empirical analysis is based on a qualitative comparison of 16 Danish childcare centers 0-6 year-olds, selected to ensure systematic variation in span of control and hierarchical leadership structure and maximum similarity in all other important regards. The investigated leaders all had direct employee responsibilities for all employees in the center, and leader and employees always worked at the same physical location.

Based on existing statistics (Dalsgaard, Nøhr, and Jordan 2014; Kommunale Nøgletal 2014), we selected four municipalities with similar resources allocated to childcare and with similar social backgrounds among the children. Within each municipality, we selected four childcare centers which were also similar on these parameters. Two municipalities had two levels of leaders between employees and the regulatory level, and two municipalities had only one leader between these levels. In each municipality we chose the smallest and the largest childcare centers (only one of the

originally identified centers chose not to participate and was replaced with the third largest center in the municipality). The selected childcare centers are shown in table 1, depending on their span of control and hierarchical structure (see also *reference to background report will be added*).

Table 1: Investigated childcare centers after their span of control and hierarchical structure

	Childcare centers with one levels of pedagogical leaders	Childcare centers with two levels of pedagogical leaders
Span of control 6–17 employees/leader	4 childcare centers (no. 1 , 3 , 7 and 8)	4 childcare centers (no. 2, 4 , 5 and 6)
Span of control 18–34 employees/leader	4 childcare centers (no. 12 , 14 , 15, and 16)	4 childcare centers (no. 9, 10, 11 and 13)

Note: The numbers reflect the exact rank order of the childcare centers (small numbers, narrow spans of control).

Numbers in bold are childcare centers where we observed the leaders for two days each.

Within the childcare centers, we tried to select employees in a way which resulted in employees with similar personal characteristics and prevented leader-selection bias. Specifying that we wanted to interview (a) one employee from the section for younger children and one from the section for older children, (b) only females in the age range of 30 to 40 years with (c) at least two years' organizational tenure and (d) at least five years' experience in childcare centers, we tried to ensure that the variation on these characteristics was limited between centers and that the leaders would have little discretion to select specific types of employees. If two or more employees were possible alternatives, we asked to interview the employee who had last had birthday. This does not guarantee that the selection is unbiased, because the leaders can have decided that troublesome employees were not made available, but the criteria have hopefully limited the potential bias.

DATA AND OVERALL STRATEGY OF ANALYSIS

We combined interviews with systematic observations in order to strengthen validity and provide information regarding different aspects of leadership and motivation. While observation identifies interaction content and patterns as well as the sometimes unconscious behavior in the childcare centers, the interviews allow us to measure internal, latent variables such as motivation and perceptions of leadership. For example, the observation allowed us to register and compare all behavior observed related to developing, sharing and sustaining visions for the childcare centers, while the interviews gave us access to both leaders' and employees' reflections about these visions.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 32 employees and their 16 direct leaders. All interviewees are female. The fact that we interviewed both leaders and their employees (and were able to link their statements) makes our empirical data uniquely suited to answer the research question. The theoretical framework guided the semi-structured interviews (for interview guides see Appendix 1), but the flexibility of the interviews still allowed interviewees to unfold subjective interpretations and accounts.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed in Nvivo based on systematic coding. All interviews were coded in full by researchers and/or student assistants based on a code list with exact descriptions (see Appendix 4). All statements were systematically condensed and compared in matrix displays. Observation was carried out in the leaders' natural environment (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 33) in order to explore their daily institutional lives, the content of their days, and their interaction with employees. In total, 16 days of observation were undertaken for eight of the participating leaders (two days each). Observations were, with one exception, carried out prior to interviewing so that insights from the observations could be used in the interviews. Insights from observation were also used in the production of the interview guides. Observation notes of what was

said and done with whom and where were taken in real time. The elaborated and computerized notes were coded and collected in five theme tables.

OPERATIONALIZATION

We have measures of transformational leadership at both individual and organizational level via our observations of leaders (and their interactions with employees) and interview statements from both leaders and employees. Using the employees' answers in the interviews to measure both leadership and motivation might cause common source bias (Meier and O'Toole 2013), and using the leaders' self-assessments of their leadership strategy to classify their level of transformational leadership might cause social desirability bias (Kim and Kim 2016). We therefore triangulated interview statements from employees and leaders with each other and with observation data. We observed the leaders' actions, and the leaders as well as employees were asked to categorize their/their leaders' leadership strategy based on three graphic illustrations (of transformational, transactional and non-active leadership, see Appendix 2) and to describe how they/their leader actually acted.

We measure the content of the vision by asking the leaders what is emphasized as being desirable in the organization. In our comparison of the contents of visions and the PSM of the employees, we focus on doing good for (1) children and (2) society. We also measure the employees' level of paternalism by coding whether the employees hold on to their own understanding of doing good or whether they are willing to include other understandings (e.g. parents' or politicians' understandings of what doing good means in the childcare center).

Concerning motivation, we use the intensity of the statements about being motivated by contributing to others and society. If employees for example mention these types of motivation spontaneously when asked about what makes them go to work, it signals that they see doing good for others and society as more important than when they only mention it when they are asked

specifically about it. Concerning the type of PSM, we asked both general and specific questions for each of the four original dimensions proposed by Perry (1996). Given the theoretical focus, this article only differentiates between motivation to contribute to specific others (here the children) and to society. We also classified the level of paternalism, looking for statements that indicated motivation to “do good” in one’s own (paternalistic) definition of “good” or as understood by parents and/or politicians. Leaders and employees who do not actively express who decided what is good for society and others are classified as neutral.

ANALYSIS

Our analysis of *transformational leadership* is based on all observation and interview data from a particular center. Both leaders and employees were asked (1) to describe how they/their leader actually acted in terms of presenting and sharing visions and (2) to categorize their/their leaders’ strategy based on illustrations of transformational, transactional and non-active leadership. During the structured observation, we looked for whether the leaders articulated clear visions in their interaction with the employees (reflecting higher levels of transformational leadership). Given that leaders might perform transformational actions when we were not observing them, we cannot rely only on the observational data, but the data sources yielded almost the same results.

So, how did transformational leadership actually happen in the childcare centers? In some centers, we saw a lot of examples of leadership behavior directed towards clarifying and sharing visions, and the employees in these centers also told us about their leaders’ transformational behavior during the interviews. Employee no. 06.2 in childcare center 6 for example said that her leader gives direction to the work and tries to present and share a motivating vision. The quote below also illustrates that this leadership behavior apparently succeeds in capturing the employee’s interest, and the employee herself seems to feel elevated to a higher level of enthusiasm.

What she is saying is very exciting, and that is what we should work toward. She has an amazing enthusiasm when she talks about it (employee no. 6.2).

Another example is the leader at center 9 who reported that she combined transformational leadership with transactional leadership. Although she did not rely solely on transformational leadership, her behavior was still highly transformational. This matches her employees' statements. Employee no. 9.2 from childcare center 9 (cited below) is for example enthusiastic about the vision, although not as much as the employees at childcare center 6.

[The childcare leader] wants us to see why the things she presents are great, and why it is exiting and useful. It makes a difference, the way she looks at and communicates things (employee no. 9.2).

Some leaders (for example in childcare center 4) gave direction, but not consistently in a transformational way. This is also reflected in what their employees said about their leadership.

She knows where she wants us to go, and she also wants to create acceptance. But if she does not get acceptance, she uses command. Then it becomes "because I said so" (employee no. 04.2).

Other leaders were very passive and did not seem to behave transformational at all. Employee no. 02.3 for example answered "no" when we asked her if she felt they were working in the same direction in her center, and she continued to state that the lack of direction meant that "you lack a firm core, making it more difficult to utilize each other's resources". The examples show how different leadership can be in the childcare centers. An overview of all the childcare centers can be seen in table A6-1 in Appendix 6.

Classifications of PSM were based on all statements in the interviews related to doing good for others and/or society. Starting from a matrix display with all relevant statements from each person, we systematically condensed the material. It was relevant to see whether each employee

was public service motivated, whether this motivation was paternalistic, and whether the employee was most focused on doing good for the children or for society. Table A6-2 in Appendix 6 contains the condensed text for each employee and the categorization on the three aspects.

Although the employees were generally highly motivated to do good for society and others (especially for the children), there were differences, for example between employee 13.2 and employee 4.3. While employee 13.2 sometimes only comes to work, because her own family needs the money, employee 4.3 talks very differently about her motivation, stressing her enthusiasm for saving the world and giving the children a better life. Below, direct quotes from these two employees can be compared.

Some mornings, I think “Well, it would be nice to have a sick child I had to stay at home with or something”. You don’t do it, but the thought is there ... There are several days when I don’t want to be here, but I show up because my own kids need food, and my husband needs clothes (employee no. 13.2).

I became a pedagogue to save the world. Really [...] I think that you give the children a better life in the future (employee 4.3)

All employees are somewhat oriented towards doing good for the children, but their motivation to do good for society varies. The quote above from employee 4.3 (above) illustrates that some of the childcare workers (nine) are oriented to do good for both children and society, while 22 are only child-oriented in their PSM (one could not be classified).

The employees are generally not very paternalistic. Few of them think that only their own understanding of doing good is valid. Some of them (12 out of 32) state that doing good should be defined by the users and/or politicians, for example employee 16.2 (see the citation below) for whom the children’s understanding of the desirable is central. Others (like employee 3.2 cited

below) have their own definition. Many are, however, neutral in the sense that they do not actively express who should decide what is good for society and others.

One should be able to see that they [the children] had me as a pedagogue so that they can proceed with high capacity for action, take care of each other, have “drive” and be generally knowledgeable (employee 3.2)

I am making a difference for the children, and I feel it through the joy they show me when they give me a hug (16.2)

In sum, the typical childcare employee has a relatively high level of child-oriented, non-paternalistic PSM, but there are variations. The next step is to see whether these variations can be connected to the leadership behavior in the childcare center.

Hypothesis 1 expects higher PSM for employees with leaders who practice transformational leadership. Based on our classifications of transformational leadership and PSM (shown in full in Appendix 6), the pattern seems to confirm this, because employees tend to be systematically more motivated to do good for others and society in the childcare centers with transformational leaders. These employees also link their leaders’ behavior to their own higher level of PSM. Employee 09.3 (see citation below) for example expresses this when she first categorizes her leader as being committed and able to give direction and then follows up by saying that this makes her proud of being a pedagogue and that the leader is good at motivating the employees. Few employees make the connection this clearly, and when we turn to their links between lack of transformational leadership and low motivation, their most explicit statements concern former leaders (like employee 11.2 cited below).

[When the leader was away on education] we sailed in different directions, but when she came back, we became one big ferry... The fact that she is so engaged in her work and so good at motivating us and developing us gives us enthusiasm. You don’t become tired of

being a pedagogue because you feel that there are new measures and new ideas ... [the leader] makes you proud of working in [name of childcare center] and proud of being a pedagogue.

You feel that you can contribute with something (employee no. 9.3).

EVERY suggestion was rejected [by the former leader]. And it was “It has to be this way!” It was a bad start ... Nobody felt ownership for ANYTHING at all, and then it is difficult to be committed to one’s work (employee 11.2, capital letters show emphasis in the statements).

In terms of mechanisms, our empirical material suggests that the association between transformational leadership and PSM has much to do with the “sharing the vision” part of transformational leadership. Employees do not seem to get higher PSM unless they experience that the vision is actually shared in the organization. The statement from employee 9.3 (above) also suggests that it is important to maintain the vision, given that she actually felt less motivated when her leader was away on education. This quote also suggests that it is important to perceive that you can give a societal contribution in your job (“you feel that you can contribute”), and this actually substantiates quantitative findings in the literature concerning the importance of perceived societal impact (e.g. van Loon et al. 2016).

Hypothesis 2 expects that PSM will be more society-oriented in childcare centers where the leaders use more transformational leadership. Our empirical material gives some support to this expectation, but the association is certainly not very strong. Only four employees (out of the 32 we interviewed) gave priority to society, but they all worked at childcare centers where the leader behaved in a transformational way. Analyzing the content of the visions gives us a better understanding of lack of societal orientation in the employees’ PSM. As documented in table A6-3 in Appendix 6, almost all childcare centers have very child-oriented visions. The three examples below are typical for how the leaders talk about organizational visions.

We are here for the children to give them a good day, well-being and positive personal development (leader no. 15.1).

Everything is down to being a place worth being for the children (leader no. 7.1).

We are here because of children's learning (leader no. 10.1).

Most of the visions thus see the individual children's well-being and/or learning achievements as the central desirable end states. In contrast, only two leaders mention contributing to society. The leaders who are concerned about societal issues (childcare centers 9 and 11) tend to focus on the contribution to society through the children's learning and educational aspects. Childcare center 11 does, however, exemplify a more purely societally oriented vision:

We talk about the 95 percent of a year-group who are to complete a youth educational program ... this is relevant for a changed perspective on children and increased inclusion of all children (leader no. 11.1)

Turning to the potential for transformational leadership to prevent paternalism, hypothesis 3 expects employee PSM to be less paternalistic in childcare centers where leaders practice transformational leadership. There is some support to this expectation. Almost half of the employees in childcare centers with a low level of transformational leadership suggest that their own understanding of "doing good for society and others" is prioritized higher than understandings among parents and/or politicians, while none of the employees in childcare centers with a high or very high level of transformational leadership make these types of statements. If we look at the leaders' paternalism (or lack thereof), this is understandable. None of 16 leaders are not paternalistic (they are either non-paternalistic or neutral). Transformational leadership can hardly decrease paternalism if the leader is paternalistic herself, but for these non-paternalistic and neutral leaders, the findings suggest that transformational leadership might succeed in making the employees relate to the visions of the

childcare centers and ultimately the objectives specified by politicians and users and not (only) their own understanding of what is desirable. There is, in other words, some support to hypothesis 3.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Given that the association between transformational leadership and PSM attracts much scientific and societal attention (Vandenabeele 2014; Krogsgaard, Thomsen, and Andersen 2014), it is useful to supplement existing quantitative findings with qualitative data, because interviews and observation data contribute with in-depth knowledge about mechanisms and the type of PSM. We thus find that the level and type of PSM differ between employees at childcare centers with different levels of transformational leadership. Higher level of transformational leadership is associated with higher level of employee PSM, and there are indications that transformational leadership makes the employees' PSM less paternalistic. In the 16 analyzed childcare centers, both employee PSM and organizational visions are very oriented towards the individual children and not very society-oriented, and it would be relevant for future research to study organizations with different tasks and different contents of the visions.

Quantitative studies have found positive effects of transformational leadership on PSM (e.g. Bellé 2014), and this article shows that this result is robust when we analyze it qualitatively. The key contribution of this article is, however, that we illustrate qualitatively how employees and leaders talk about the concepts and their relationship, and that we are able to see that these statements are consistent with their observed behavior. Using both interviews and observation data and asking both employees and leaders increase the validity of the findings because it enables us to triangulate the measure of transformational leadership. Since both leaders and their employees are analyzed (and their statements and behavior can be linked), our empirical data is uniquely suited to answer the research question. Still, this study only includes 16 childcare centers in one country, and

the generalizability is therefore limited. Importantly, the findings also suggest that it is relevant to discuss further what PSM actually is when studying various subsectors of the public services. Should we only focus on society-oriented motivation when we study PSM, or is it also relevant to include the motivation to do good for specific users? A newly published study of general practitioners indicates that these two types of motivation have different consequences, but can best be understood in connection to each other (Jensen & Andersen 2015). Furthermore, new research indicates that national culture is associated with individuals' PSM (Kim 2015), and it would be highly interesting to see whether the association between leadership and PSM is context dependent. We therefore urge future research to perform similar analyses in organizations with other tasks and in other countries.

Orazi et al. (2013: 486) recommend that “public sector leaders should behave mainly as transformational leaders”, but transformational leadership might have more complex effects on motivation than assumed until now. If future research can confirm that transformational leadership matters for level as well as type of motivation and for paternalism, it might affect the understanding of performance itself. What does it take to succeed? Should childcare centers “only” deliver good services to each child, or should they also recognize their societal responsibility? Our results indicate that leaders might be able to affect their employees' understandings of these questions through transformational leadership.

While the association between transformational leadership and the *level* of PSM is well-documented in other studies (e.g. Wright et al. 2012), our knowledge about the association between transformational leadership and the *type* of PSM is more sparse. This study can, however, put the issue on the agenda and inspire future studies to analyze it in other contexts. Ideally, qualitative studies can contribute with in-depth understandings which can then be tested quantitatively. We think that the findings regarding transformational leadership, paternalism and societal orientation

are worth analyzing further, because they could be potentially important to understand different priorities within public service organizations. Our results thus suggest that a deeper understanding of how transformational leadership affects the *type* of PSM can be useful.

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